Dreaming into our Collective Future

I have always been a person who deeply cares about how other people and beings are treated. When I first realized that the chicken on my dinner plate had once been a living, squawking bird, I sat at the dinner table and cried until my parents told me I didn’t have to eat meat anymore. I hated playing games with other kids that involved any sort of aggression and often found solace in being alone and exploring the world through books. I have always been curious about my place in the world and continuously try to understand other people and why they behave in certain ways. As a very empathic person, I am also deeply affected by other people’s pain, including the pain of people I’ve never met. Partly because of this, I have been navigating a relationship with depression since I was in sixth grade. As a child, fiction books provided me with an escape from painful realities. As a young adult, I felt like fiction didn’t fully allow me to escape reality anymore and turned to works of non-fiction to find more concrete answers to the problems I saw in the world around me. In my first years in college, as a science and environmental policy student, I left the majority of my classes feeling hopeless about the state of the world. My professors continuously talked with us about climate change and the failures of our society. Then they would look to us, their students, to solve the things that they were talking about. When I left my courses, I held a significant weight on my shoulders. How was I supposed to solve these immense global problems? I felt overwhelmed. More recently, I have been searching for visions of the future that see possibilities outside of our current reality. This has led me to begin reading works of visionary fiction that fill me with hope that a different future is possible.

During the start of the pandemic, I found myself becoming increasingly fascinated with the ways people were coming together in support of each other when the government’s response was too slow. Mutual aid groups seemed to be arising everywhere and organizing to
gather supplies and funds to help folks in their communities pay rent and access food and other necessities. It was at this time that I read an article titled “Mystical Anarchism” and was deeply influenced by the author’s wisdom that we need to be working at the individual, community and systemic levels simultaneously to make true change in the world around us. I began more in-depth research into how we can continually uplift each other through times of hardship, acknowledging that climate change will begin posing exponentially more challenges to our communities. I heard stories about mutual aid groups supporting communities after very intense hurricane seasons and horrendous summer wildfires. These stories inspired me to think about the ways that our communities can do better than our current system of governance, which can feel very detached from its people. The Black Lives Matter movement that gained momentum in the summer also showed me how communities can come together in solidarity to fight a different kind of pandemic. The autonomous zones that were established in cities across the country reflected a more concrete kind of mutual aid. My interest in these forms of community care led me to begin engaging more deeply with adrienne maree brown’s work around community and movement spaces. I began to follow her wisdom back into science fiction, a genre which I hadn't read in years since I felt I couldn’t see myself or my interests reflected in popular works. This is when I found Starhawk and Ocatvia Butler. Both of these women have crafted beautiful works of visionary fiction which I felt incredibly connected to and inspired by.

Over time, more works of science fiction and non-fiction that I had previously read began to feel grouped together in my mind with the works of Butler, Starhawk and brown. All of these books are deeply meaningful to me. The margins are full of comments and drawing and underlines because they showed me that the world can look different than it does today. They showed me that alternate futures to the present we are living in are possible if we dream into them. The world doesn’t have to end in an apocalypse because our government prioritized capitalism over addressing the realities of climate change and the failings of social systems. If
we truly believe that we can get to a world that is better for everyone and the earth, we can start
taking the steps to move into it.

The books that have provided me with inspiration for my dreams of the future fall into
three categories. The first category consists of the non-fiction books that show us ways in which
people are currently thinking and acting to begin moving us onto a different path. These include
everything written by adrienne maree brown, books by Indigenous authors who show how
non-western cultures have continuously maintained reciprocity with the earth and each other,
and books on trauma and hope. These texts have provided me with a sense of agency in the
now, ways that I can be and act that have the power to shift the wellbeing of the community of
people around me. The second category of books are works of science fiction that dream of a
future which is diverse and connected to the earth. These books often juxtapose a utopian
society and a dystopian one, both of which arise many years into the future out of a world very
similar to our own. In these works, Starhawk and Butler are the visionaries I find most powerful.
Other authors have also shaped my view of what is possible, including Ernest Callenbach and
his vision of an ecotopia and Ursula Le Guin’s comparison of anarchist and materialist worlds.
The third category is comprised of an assortment of other genres from youth fiction to poetry to
religious texts and works of fiction that have influenced my thinking about how we build
communities and exist with the earth in a meaningful way. All of these books have allowed me to
create hope for myself and the world around me. I can now see that there is a pathway forward,
and there is a vision of what a different and better world can look like. Now, when I leave my
classes or read the news, I feel like I have ideas and answers to the harms I see in the world
around me. This collection of books will continue growing as I keep building and sharing my
dreams for the future of this planet.
Annotated Bibliography

Non-fiction


   Indigenous wisdom is incredibly powerful. One of the best ways to move past a western, colonial mindset is to look for wisdom that has been passed down despite the oppressions of colonialism. In dreaming of an alternate future, it is important to recognize that others have already lived a version of that future and had it stolen away from them by the people who established this country. In this book, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson uses her Indigenous wisdom to show us how we can act in our communities to restore right relationship with each other and the land. She shows us a pathway toward decolonization and steps we can take within our communities to begin that journey.


   This guide to emergent strategy shows us ways that we can be and act in the world today to move ourselves toward a future that is better for everyone. Adrienne Maree Brown is one of my personal heroes. I listen to every podcast that she hosts or is a guest on, read her blog, follow her social media and am slowly working my way through her published books. She is truly a visionary who has helped me move out of despair and into a knowing that, if we pay attention to patterns in nature, we can move into a future that allows all of us to be taken care of in the ways that we deserve. In this book, she teaches how to change the way we function as communities to move us onto a path towards a better future.


   In this book, Adrienne Maree Brown explores ways to use transformative justice to address harm that occurs in our communities as an alternative to cancel culture. She discusses ways outside of the current structures in which we can hold each other accountable and grow as communities and individuals. This book is a powerful look at how we can start interacting with each other now to move us towards a future in which we are all seen and valued. Sometimes concepts like transformative justice can seem abstract, so seeing real examples and methodologies of it is extremely helpful to learning how we can create space to see each other with love rather than judgement.


   I read this book at a time when I was struggling with what I was learning as I worked towards my degree in the sciences. I was frustrated with how much of what I was being taught was from a white, male perspective that felt very biased by European cultural
backgrounds, and yet, claimed to be objective. Reading this book helped me realize that there is a wealth of knowledge about how the earth functions that is not codified in western scientific ways. This expanded my world view and allowed me to increase my understanding of how we can relate to the earth. Similarly to As We have Always Done, this book shows us a pathway toward decolonization that allows the good parts of western society to move forward.


This article first allowed me to put words to how I felt about my political views as a pathway forward. Ladha focuses on the idea that you need to be working at three levels simultaneously to create change—the self, the community and the system. This idea is echoed in many of the other works in my collection, especially by adrienne maree brown. This article brings political and spiritual/moral values together in a concrete way that I had not previously encountered. At a time when I was struggling to find others whose beliefs align with my own, this article provided me with the realization that there are other people out there who think like me and want to move in a similar direction.


I first read this book when I was feeling hopeless after leaving my science and environmental policy classes. This book helped me refocus my energy and become aware of the agency I do have to create change. Whenever I fall back into feeling hopeless, I refer back to the wisdom in this book to find inspiration to continue moving toward the future that I believe is possible.


This book helped me more deeply understand how people around me are processing trauma and how we can work towards breaking cycles of abuse within our communities. This is really important to me since we can’t move into a better future without addressing the issues that are causing us pain now. Other books have helped me understand how certain structures and systems harm us but this book provided insight into how harm plays out internally. It provided me with knowledge on how we can work towards healing harm to prevent from re-perpetuating it onto others.

Visionary Science Fiction


I read this for the first time during COVID-19 and right before the election. I felt like Ocatavia laid out the world we are living in today in a way that is only slightly more
It was as if we were on the cusp of this book becoming a reality. Lauren Olimina, the Black, female protagonist, believes that, despite the horrors of the world she navigates through, a better future is possible. Along her journey, she preaches the things she feels are truths that will allow people to collectively move into an alternate reality. I feel that the most powerful of these truths is “All that you touch you change. All that you change, changes you. The only lasting truth is change. God is change.” (p.3). In the time of a global pandemic and the daily horrors of the world we live in, this quote has helped remind me that everything will change; a different future is possible and lies within our grasp. Octavia Butler saw the ways in which the future could play out based on the things she experienced in her lifetime and projected these futures into fiction, giving us a guide to what the world can look like and how we can cope with it and change it.


In *Wild Seed*, Octavia explores a relationship between two eternal beings who hold their shape-shifting powers in very different ways. The dynamic between the two characters moves from a controlling and harmful power dynamic to one that is more oriented around trust, love and the ability for the characters to each other's power and humanity. This work shows us how we can move from intense systems of control over each other to communities in which each person's beauty and uniqueness is celebrated.


Callenbach envisions a future in which an ecologic utopia exists alongside a dystopian society that continues extracting resources from the earth in harmful ways. He shows us what a utopian society that co-exists with the earth can look like, providing detailed and researched information on ways in which we can be in a reciprocal relationship with the earth and each other. The biggest downfall of this book is that it maintains racial segregation, which Callenbach claims is a choice of the people in the society, but is not how I or the majority of other authors in this collection envision the future. This was one of the first books I read that clearly laid out a vision of the future that was different and (mostly) better than the current reality we live in. It awakened my imagination to the possibilities of the future in which humans chose a different path than the one we are on now, and remains an important work to me for that reason.


In this work of science fiction, Le Guin compares and contrasts a society that is divided and focused on money and a society that is based in an anarchist community. This book explores the pitfalls and high points of both societies through a character that grew up in one world and travels to the other. I'm continuously fascinated with what other types of societies can look like and really appreciated the juxtaposition of a world similar to our own with a world that was established with community and relationships as its guide. Le
Guin’s exploration of the pitfalls of a seemingly utopian society are a good reminder that nothing will ever be perfect and we will always have to grow and change the societies we live in.


This book was eye opening for me and led my back into science fiction after a long break due to not seeing myself or the alternate futures I envisioned in what I was reading. Starhawk beautifully depicts a future in which a dystopian and utopian society are juxtaposed. When the two societies meet, the utopian society radically imagines a way to greet the dystopian folks and win a war without committing violence against people who are just like them but live under an entirely different system of governance. Starhawk’s dream of this possibility awakened me to visionary fiction and the idea that the future can look like whatever we dream into it.


This is the prequel to *The Fifth Sacred Thing* and follows the journey of a girl who later becomes an elder in that utopian society. Her journey of finding herself and reconnecting to the earth takes places through the late 1900s and early 2000s. This allows us to see what shaped her before she goes on to help create and shape the utopia presented in *The Fifth Sacred Thing*. This book shows us what Starhawk believes is necessary to be developed in communities to get to the point of building a society that radically reimagines the ways in which we interact with each other and the land.

Other- Poetry, Youth, Fiction, Religion


I remember reading and re-reading this novel many times in elementary school and I still think about the impact this story had on me. Fern, a young girl, feels like she is different from everyone around her and realizes that she has the ability to reach into paintings and books and bring the characters to life. As a very imaginative child, I longed to be able to do the same. This book helped me begin envisioning worlds around me that were different from and better than the reality that I lived in. I see this as the first book in this collection as it allowed me to start dreaming about alternatives to the things that were painful in everyday life.


This was one of the first science fiction books I read as a child. I think I first read it in 5th or 6th grade and reread it many times before starting highschool. I was absolutely fascinated by the sibling dynamic that is highlighted in the first few chapters. I saw myself in Ender’s sister, Valentine and liked to imagine how the story would have unfolded differently if she had been in Ender’s place. This book allowed me to begin
exploring science fiction with a character who I saw myself in. I voraciously consumed sci-fi books after reading this, but most of them are not part of this list because they did not have the vision or characters that I was looking for. Not seeing characters like myself in the sci-fi I was reading is primarily what led me to consume more non-fiction in highschool and college.


This compilation of Buddhist environmental texts was first introduced to me in a course with Rachel Demotts, one of the people from whom I learned about the importance of practicing meditation in its many forms as a way to stay grounded despite the challenges that arise from living in a world in which we harm each other and the earth on a daily basis. I refer to passages in this book on a regular basis to help myself reconnect to my breath and the earth. It has been incredibly helpful to me to find new ways to meditate other than just sitting and to work on being present and grounded in the reality of my now.


In this book, Barbara Kingsolver discusses how she and her family managed to sustain themselves for an entire year by growing, harvesting and killing the majority of their food. More than just a story, this book provides insight into methods of farming, storing and cooking that allowed the Kingsolver family to live entirely off of the land. In thinking about ways we can move forward into a better future, this book provided me with a practical guide to sustainably living off of the land. In our current society, we can be so disconnected from our food sources and this book made me think about how we can become more connected to place by growing and consuming food from the soil right outside our doors.


This beautiful book of poems helps me reconnect with the beauty that already exists in everything around me. The poem “We Shake with Joy” has been especially powerful in reminding me of the dualities that exist in everything. I am allowed to be happy and sad in the same week, day and moment. This is a freeing concept.


This story about trees and the complex lives of people who live with them helped me think more deeply about the perspectives of plants. We can learn so much from the wisdom of trees. Many of the authors here draw on the wisdom of nature to envision how we can act differently as a society. This book provided inspiration for me to think about
our diverse relationships with nature and how we can build on these relationships to create reciprocity between ourselves and the rest of the natural world.


This guide to everyday witchcraft has allowed me to deepen my spiritual practices and feel connected to my ancient European ancestors. It has helped me understand that not all of my ancestors were Christian colonizers. Long ago, some of them also practiced rituals within their communities to help ground and connect them to the earth. I view this ancient wisdom that has somehow survived, despite witch burnings and colonialism, as a powerful tool for learning about ways to alter our relationship with each other and the earth.

**Wish List**


*Patternmaster* is the first book in the Patternist series, of which *Wild Seed* is the prequel. Octavia Butler has so much wisdom to offer us, and I have only barely scratched the surface of her works. All of her books are on my wish list, but the first book in this series feels like a good place to start. I have found so much inspiration in the two books I’ve read by her and they are both an integral part of this collection. I am certain that her books will continue to shape me and my dreams of our collective future.


This work of speculative fiction takes place in a dark future in which the protagonist sets out to end genocide against her people. I have been recommended this book a few times because of my love of Octavia Butler and Starhawk and think that I will likely learn a lot from it as well. Exploring science fiction for the types of stories I’m looking for has been an ongoing challenge. There are tens of science fiction books that do not appear as part of this collection because they don’t reach far enough or believe that humans can ever be good enough to move away from harm.


I want to add this book to my collection because I think it will help me build on my knowledge around the effects of trauma and how we can work towards healing it. I’m interested in learning more about racialized trauma because racism is a major barrier in moving towards the types of futures that I envision are possible. I want to live in a world where everyone can be well.

This collection of works of speculative fiction would likely become one of the core books in my collection. It utilizes fiction to dream into the future and envision the many ways that we can exist as communities. I’m working my way through all of Adrienne Maree Brown’s books, but I haven’t gotten a hold of this one yet. Based on my love for everything else that she has helped create, I feel that I will fall in love with this work.


This short book contains interviews with folks who survived climate disasters and explores ways in which we can come together as communities to support each other before emergencies arise. With climate disasters increasing every season, this book will serve me by helping me more deeply understand how we can deal with crises most effectively as communities. Being prepared before something happens is vital, but most of us chose not to think about the dangers that climate change poses. I think this work will add more ideas around agency to my collection and help me understand how we can move forward in the face of climate change.